



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

The Role Of Music Therapy, Especially Raga Music, In Suicide Prevention

1Dr. Sudokshina Manna Chatterjee

1S.A.C.T (Lecturer) of Hindustani Classical Music

1Vivekananda College For Women, Barisha, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

Introduction

What is Suicide and Suicide attempt?

Suicide is defined as death caused by self-directed injurious behavior with an intention to die. A suicide attempt is a self-directed, potentially injurious behavior with an intention to die. A suicide attempt might not always result in death but can seriously harm a human being physically and mentally for the rest of their life. Suicide has emerged as one of the most serious public health concerns worldwide. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), suicide is among the leading causes of death among young people aged 15–29.

Suicide and its prevention in India

In India, where cultural, social, and economic pressures often trigger stress, anxiety, depression, hopelessness and negativity, the suicide rate is alarmingly high. In this context, innovative and culturally rooted approaches to mental health care are gaining significance. One such approach is Music Therapy or Therapeutic use of Music, particularly using the rich traditions of Indian raga music. With its deep emotional resonance Indian classical music offers promising possibilities for suicide prevention and emotional well-being.

Suicide and Mental Health Challenges in India

Firstly it is essential to recognize the causes of suicide in India besides learning the role and implications of Raga Music Therapy.

Causes of Suicide and Suicide attempts in India

a) Psychological Causes-

Various psychological causes like Depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, Low self-esteem, hopelessness, loneliness, Impulsivity in youth trigger ideation of Suicide.

b) Social & Environmental Causes

Academic stress, exam failure, career pressure, relationship issues like breakups, rejection, family conflict, bullying and cyberbullying,

Family problems of violence, neglect, addiction, broken families, social isolation and lack of support etc. are also some of the prominent social causes.

c)Economic & Practical Causes

Joblessness, career uncertainty.

financial struggles, poverty, debts,urbanization,migration to alien country,living away from home support also lead to suicide and Suicide attempts.

d)Biological Causes

Genetic vulnerability i.e.family history of suicide/mental illness,

Substance abuse of alcohol, drugs etc,chronic illness or physical disability are also responsible for initiating people towards suicide ideation.

e)Cultural & Societal Influences

Stigma around mental health- silence and shame to approach psychiatrist with mental health issues.

Gender expectations where men are expected to be strong,earn money and support full family.

Women on the other hand faces harassment,restrictions,social control.

Media and social media influence

f)Traumatic Events

Sudden loss or death of loved one.Trauma or abuse.

Legal/disciplinary problems.

Witnessing or hearing about suicide in peers or celebrities.

Warning Signs to Watch Out For

Talking about death or hopelessness,withdrawing from friends and activities,sudden changes in sleep or eating habits,decline in academic performance,Substance use like drug or alcohol,Reckless or violent behavior,giving away belongings or saying goodbye are some of the alerts of or indications of Suicidal tendency.

Prevention and fighting ideation of Suicidal Attempt

Conventional approaches like counseling, psychiatric care, and medication are crucial but often inaccessible due to lack of awareness, stigma, and shortage of trained professionals. Here, culturally acceptable and non-stigmatizing methods such as music therapy can play a vital complementary role in suicide prevention.

What is Music Therapy?

Music therapy is the clinical and evidence-based use of music to address physical, emotional, cognitive, and social needs of individuals.

What is the basic difference between Indian and Western context of planning and executing Music Therapy?

The societal framework of India and Western countries are different with people having different mindset, outlook and likewise with different physical and mental health issues and needs.Si,unlike Western music therapy, which often emphasizes structured interventions such as guided improvisation or lyric analysis, Indian music therapy draws heavily upon the therapeutic effects of ragas—melodic frameworks designed to evoke particular moods, emotions, and states of consciousness which is relevant for the Indian mindset and mental health issues.

What is Raga Music Therapy?

Raga Music Therapy is a form of sound healing that uses specific Indian classical ragas to promote emotional, mental, and physical well-being. It harnesses the therapeutic effects of melody, rhythm, and mood inherent in ragas to balance and harmonize the mind and body.The Raga music therapy is deeply intertwined with spirituality, Ayurveda, yoga, and centuries-old traditions that recognize the healing potential of sound and

melody. It's various aesthetic aspects rendered by vocalists or played in various traditional Indian Classical instruments are used to combat and mental health issues. Meditative Alaaps, Improvisations in the compositions, Flights of Notes or Taans and Sargams, Embellishments, different moods, of ragas etc. generates a variety of emotional responses in listeners and patients. The impact of Raga Music is processed in the limbic system of the brain after passing through the auditory cortex, resulting in an emotional reaction. Indian classical ragas are not merely musical scales; they are living entities that embody emotional colors (rasa) and psychological energies. The ancient texts like Sama Veda and Natya Shastra acknowledge the power of sound (nada) to influence the mind and spirit. For individuals battling depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation, ragas can offer both emotional catharsis and a pathway to inner calm.

The four approaches to Raga Music Therapy

There are four types of approaches to Music Therapy in general,

- a) Receptive approach
- b) Recreational approach
- c) Compositional approach
- d) Improvisational Approach

This can be understood in the context of Indian raga music:

a) Receptive (Listening to Raga) – The patient listens to specific ragas (e.g., Ahir Bhairav for calmness, Yaman for positivity) to evoke therapeutic emotions and inner balance. Raga Todi – reduces anxiety, instills peace.

b) Re-creational (Performing Raga) – The patient sings or plays established bandishes/ compositions in ragas, reinforcing memory, discipline, and emotional expression. Raga Yaman – creates positivity, devotion, and mental balance.

c) Compositional (Creating in Raga) – The patient composes new lyrics or melodies within a raga framework, channeling personal feelings into creative and structured musical form. Raga Hansadhwani – helps express positivity and creative energy.

d) Improvisational (Exploring Raga) – The patient freely improvises alaap, taans, or rhythmic patterns in a raga, allowing spontaneous emotional release and self-discovery. Raga Darbari Kanada – provides depth, grounding, and emotional release.

The Therapeutic Power of Indian Raga Music

The healing power of ragas lies in their ability to resonate with human emotions. Different ragas are believed to have specific effects on the mind and body:

Raga Ahir Bhairav: Calms anxiety and instills a sense of peace in the early morning hours.

Raga Darbari Kanada: Helps relieve tension, sadness, and despair by offering emotional depth and grounding.

Raga Yaman: Associated with positivity, devotion, and tranquility, making it ideal for evening relaxation.

Raga Todi: Encourages introspection and emotional release, useful for people dealing with suppressed grief.

Raga Hansadhwani - Known to soothe loneliness and foster emotional balance.

Raga Bhairavi - Fosters mental relief, devotion and positivity.

When individuals experiencing suicidal thoughts are immersed in such ragas—through listening, singing, or instrumental playing—the emotional catharsis helps them process overwhelming feelings. The repetitive, meditative patterns of Indian ragas can induce altered states of consciousness similar to mindfulness or meditation, reducing stress hormones and creating a sense of hope and connectedness.

Mechanisms Through Which Raga Music Helps in Suicide Prevention

Emotional Regulation

Raga music provides a safe outlet for suppressed emotions like grief, anger, or despair. For someone contemplating suicide, this emotional release can be life-saving.

Physiological Relaxation

Studies have shown that listening to ragas can slow the heart rate, reduce blood pressure, and lower cortisol levels, all of which counteract the physiological symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Cognitive Shifts

Raga-based improvisation encourages creativity, helping individuals reframe negative thoughts and focus on beauty and harmony instead of despair.

Spiritual Connection

Many ragas carry devotional undertones, which can provide a sense of higher purpose and spiritual anchoring for those who feel isolated or hopeless.

Non-Stigmatizing Support

Unlike psychiatric treatment, which carries social stigma in many parts of India, engaging in music or attending a raga recital is culturally accepted and even celebrated, making it easier to introduce as therapy.

Practical Applications of Raga Music Therapy in Suicide Prevention

Clinical Settings

Hospitals and mental health clinics can incorporate raga-based listening sessions or guided singing therapy for patients at risk of suicide. This can be done alongside conventional psychiatric care.

Community Programs

Suicide prevention initiatives in schools, colleges, and rural communities can integrate raga music therapy workshops. These sessions can teach young people how to use music as a tool for stress relief and emotional expression.

Self-Care Practices

Individuals can be encouraged to incorporate raga listening into daily routines—for example, listening to calming morning ragas during meditation or evening ragas after a stressful day.

Music and Yoga Integration

Combining raga music with yoga or pranayama can deepen relaxation and improve emotional resilience.

Digital Platforms

With the popularity of streaming apps, curated raga playlists designed for relaxation, sleep, or emotional healing can reach a wide audience.

Research Evidence Supporting Raga Therapy

Though still an emerging field, research in India and abroad has shown promising results:

A study conducted at AIIMS (All India Institute of Medical Sciences) revealed that patients with anxiety and depression showed significant improvement after raga therapy sessions.

Research on Raga Darbari Kanada demonstrated its ability to lower stress levels and induce deep relaxation. Clinical trials with cancer patients undergoing painful treatments found that raga music reduced perception of pain and improved mood, highlighting its role in coping with distress.

Such evidence strengthens the case for integrating raga music into suicide prevention strategies.

Challenges in Implementation

Despite its potentiality, there are potential challenges as well. Some of them are-

Lack of Standardization: Unlike Western music therapy, Indian music therapy lacks standardized protocols.

Limited Awareness: Many mental health professionals are not trained in the therapeutic use of ragas.

Scientific Validation: More rigorous, large-scale studies are needed to establish evidence-based practices.

Accessibility: Not all individuals are familiar with classical music, and adaptations may be needed for broader appeal.

The Way Forward

For raga music therapy to play a meaningful role in suicide prevention, a multi-pronged approach is required:

- a) Collaboration between psychologists, psychiatrists, and trained music therapists.
- b) Development of curriculum and certification programs in Indian music therapy.
- c) Government and NGO initiatives to incorporate raga therapy into suicide prevention campaigns.
- d) Use of technology to create accessible platforms where individuals can access raga-based healing music.

Conclusion

Suicide prevention is not only about crisis intervention but also about nurturing resilience, hope, and emotional well-being. Indian raga music, with its profound capacity to heal, soothe, and elevate the human spirit, offers a culturally rooted, accessible, and effective tool in this endeavor. While it may not replace medical or psychological treatment, it can serve as a vital complementary approach—helping individuals reconnect with life, find meaning in moments of despair, and experience the healing power of sound. In a society like India, where music is woven into the very fabric of daily life, raga therapy has the potential to become a powerful ally in preventing suicide and fostering mental well-being. As we move toward holistic models of health care, integrating the age-old wisdom of Indian music into modern suicide prevention strategies can save lives and restore hope.